Reviewer’s report

Title: Child sexual abuse in southern Brazil and associated factors: a population-based study

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Reviewer: Michael P Dunne

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This paper reports data that add to the international epidemiology of child sexual abuse. The paper is novel to the extent that little has been published from Brazil and of the existing papers, this one has the most representative sample (albeit, from one city in southern Brazil). The survey procedures are clearly described and appear exemplary. The findings are consistent with prior research in developing countries, and while the prevalence estimates were not surprising it is notable that there are few demographic factors associated with sexual abuse. The study included measurement of a limited number of putative health outcomes and these, as expected on the basis of other research, are associated with CSA.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Abstract: Reduce the first paragraph. The 2nd sentence is unnecessary as that phenomenon is very well established already. Change the 4th sentence to: This paper aims to estimate life time prevalence of …etc”. Delete the 5th sentence commencing “Using a cross-section…”

2. In Abstract: the authors do not make clear that this sample is representative of just one city. There are no rural residents and much of the nation of Brazil was not in the sampling frame. State explicitly that the study surveyed a representative sample of the population aged 14 and over in one city in southern Brazil, to remove the implication of broader representation.

3. Introduction: The first sentence is plainly incorrect. There have been numerous community based surveys of CSA internationally. Limit the sentence to the focus on developing countries.

4. p6, line 4: The questionnaire was NOT anonymous for at least 15% of the sample who were assisted in answering questions by face to face interview.

5. p12: Delete the first paragraph. No trends were significant and the lack of association is clear in the tables.

6. The Discussion is too long-winded and repetitive. It could be reduced from 8 pages to about 5. Suggested changes include: Page 13. Delete the text in the main paragraph from the sentence beginning “A study from Polanczyk…” as it more or less repeats what is said earlier in the para..

7. p15 (top): The limitation of the sample should be acknowledged more fully and the limits to generalisability discussed here.
8. p15, end main para: I doubt the validity of the concluding statement. There has been quite a lot of research into the relative effects of CSA by family and non-family perpetrators. The review cited as evidence [#36] for the null statement here was based on research published 10 or more years ago. Either check recent research or remove the statement.

9. p16, end main para: there is no “true” prevalence for CSA and the search for the same would be naïve. 50 years of research worldwide into sexual abuse has firmly determined that prevalence is strongly influenced by social context, population characteristics, region, number of questions asked and the survey method.

10. p18-20: Most or all of the text from the Para commencing “The beneficial aspects of collecting information…” can be deleted. The points are either too obvious, or more seriously, stray beyond the data. Most of what you say there is true of any such study; in a research article such as this you should focus on what the new data add to epidemiological knowledge.

11. Table 1 is entirely unnecessary. The findings are very similar to those shown in Table 2. You must modify one key apparent error. You state in the abstract and the paper that gender is the only demographic factor associated with CSA, yet Table 2 shows that age at interview is significantly associated after adjustment. Table 3 is better re-titled as Table 1. The trends within Table “3” are much the same as T1 (indeed, the data are more informative) so 3 should replace 1.

12. Amend the text in the results section accordingly (this will reduce it quite a lot and should result in a clearer description of patterns in the data.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1) P13, line 10: Re-phrase the words “obstruct the confidence in the interpretation of these figures. Perhaps the sentence could be deleted as it is not necessary.

2) Throughout the discussion the authors lapse into first person narrative, using “our” and “we” repeatedly. This should be amended.

3) There are too many references, given the somewhat modest ground covered by this study. You could reduce by 10-15 with no loss.

4) Table 2 has spelling errors (“Condon” and “Stressfull”)

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'